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C O N F I D E N T I A L NAIROBI 001715

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DEPT FOR AF/E AND A/S FRAZER

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/18/2017

TAGS: PGOV PREL PTER PREF ASEC MOPS SO ET

SUBJECT: Somalia Fight Sharp but Short

REF: Nairobi 1636

Classified by PolOff John O'Leary. Reasons 1.4 (b) & (d)

¶1. (U) Press reporting and Embassy sources indicate fighting in Mogadishu last night (4/17) between Ethiopian forces and Hawiye/Haber Gedir militia, concentrated between the stadium and the presidential palace compound (Villa Somalia). According to the sources, there was heavy artillery and mortar shelling for about an hour along with small arms fire, followed by two hours of sporadic "explosions". There are unconfirmed press reports of at least seven dead.

¶2. (U) There is apparent consensus among Embassy sources that the fighting began when Hawiye militia noted an Ethiopian movement between the two landmarks and opened fire. One theory holds that the Ethiopians were trying to advance on Haber Gedir positions and were fired upon. The prevailing theory, however, is that the Ethiopians were merely moving troops and/or supplies between their positions and that this movement was mistaken for an advance, occasioning the attack.

¶3. (SBU) Truce talks between the Hawiye and the Ethiopians were scheduled to resume today, but observers are concerned that last night's fighting might cause one or both sides to cancel. According to contacts, the sticking point in the talks remains the Hawiye insistence that the Ethiopians withdraw from positions around the stadium captured in the late-March fighting. The Transitional Federal Government (TFG) continues to shun the truce talks and its troops continue to skirmish with Hawiye militia. In a prepared statement read today (4/18) at his biweekly press conference, the TFG's "Ambassador" to Kenya, Mohamed Ali Nur (Americo), mentioned that "...government officials initiated talks with clan elders and so far had positive progress towards peace in Mogadishu."

¶4. (C) Comment. No additional information about TFG "talks" with clan elders is available. If Nur is referring to the Hawiye in Mogadishu, such consultations are outside the framework of the truce talks. More likely, if such talks have occurred, they are probably inconsequential to the combat and may refer to matters such as the issue of tariffs at the port of Mogadishu. Despite the stalemate in the Ethiopian/Hawiye truce talks and last night's fight between the two parties, neither side appears anxious to resume full-scale battle. The continued refusal of the TFG to participate in the talks, much less officially recognize them, is spoiling prospects for a lasting solution in Mogadishu conducive to meaningful national reconciliation. End comment.

Ranneberger